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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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DEAD FISH SITUATION BEING STUDIED

Albert M. Day, Director of the Fish and Wildlife Service, explained today that the great masses of dead fish reported blanketing the waters off the west coast of Florida are the result of a natural phenomenon which occurs periodically in many parts of the world.

Weather and water conditions combine, the Director said, to support enormous numbers of minute organisms called dinoflagellates which are believed to be responsible for killing the fish.

Answering the challenge of this plague, known in marine circles as the "Red Tide" because of an accompanying discoloration of the water, the Service is dispatching its research vessel, the Alaska, from its base at Galveston, Texas, to survey the areas affected. Having anticipated the outbreak, all was in readiness before the infection struck. On board the vessel will be a staff of marine biologists and chemists assembled by the Service's Branch of Fishery Biology.

The Alaska is a 100-foot oceanographic research craft equipped with a sea-going laboratory, devices for measuring the concentration of chemicals essential to the growth of these organisms, and instruments for recording temperatures and salinities. The equipment is capable of operations from the surface of the water to depths as great as three miles under the sea.

The Service has been studying "Red Tide" intensively ever since outbreaks in 1946 and 1947 killed an estimated half-billion fish off the Gulf Coast. The Alaska expedition plans to collect samples of the organisms for chemical analysis aboard the vessel and for shipment to laboratories in New York, Galveston, and Beaufort, North Carolina, where they will be cultured.

The Coast Guard is co-operating by flying scientists on a survey over the affected area.

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